

HOW TO... Create a crossword

Are you a crossword junkie? Mike Bedford shows you how easy it is to make and customise your own word puzzles without the stumbling blocks

Perhaps you're addicted to crosswords, and the daily papers just don't provide sufficient puzzles. Maybe you'd like to have a go at making crosswords for your own enjoyment, or for your friends. Alternatively, as the editor of your club newsletter, you might fancy trying your hand at including the occasional specialist crossword puzzle. Whatever your interest, sophisticated software is available to help you generate crosswords, and here we show you how to use it. In this walkthrough, we'll explain how to produce a copious supply of random crosswords automatically and then we'll show you how you can become more creative by customising your creations.

To start, download and install the demonstration version of Crossword Express from www.crauswords.com. Unlike many unregistered shareware programs, Crossword Express is perfectly usable with hardly any cut-down or disabled features. The only significant limitation is that you can print or save crosswords with a grid size of up to 10x10 squares only, even though you can create larger crosswords.

We suggest that you follow our instructions immediately after installation, because Crossword Express remembers your settings. If you play around with it first, some of the screens may appear differently from those shown here.

1 Start Crossword Express. Click Accept and OK on the splash screens that appear to go to the Control Panel. We're going to create a crossword at random from the

dictionary supplied, so click on Construct Standard Puzzles.

2 The Make a Puzzle screen appears, and a blank 10x10 crossword is displayed. You will notice that the lattice – the grid of black and white squares – is called Monday (this defines the size of the grid and which squares are blanked out) and the dictionary is English. You could change both of these, but we just want to demonstrate how easy it is to generate a crossword, so click on Puzzle Description. In the Puzzle Description dialog box that appears, enter a suitable name into the Puzzle File Name box and click on OK.

3 To make a puzzle, click on the Start Make button. Then click OK on the Puzzle Completed dialog box that appears. All the white squares have been filled in with letters that spell out words starting in each of the numbered squares. Click on Start Make again and you'll see that a different random puzzle is generated each time.

4 Select the Print or Export a Crossword entry from the Screen menu to go to the Print a Puzzle screen. Click on Smart Print. The dialog box that appears will show how your puzzle will appear on the page. There's plenty of scope for fine-tuning the layout, but for now just click on the Print button to get a hard

copy of your completed crossword puzzle. The printout will show an empty grid with the clues alongside.

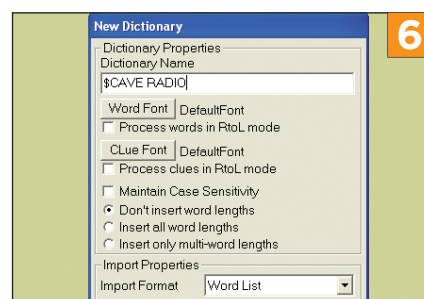
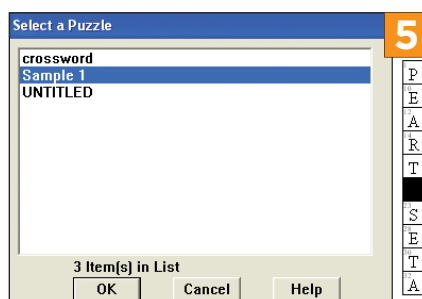
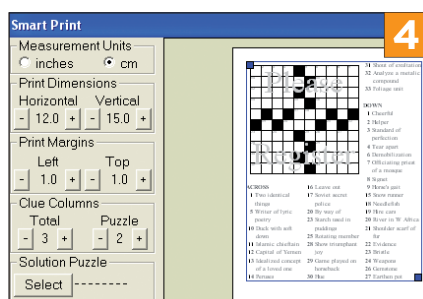
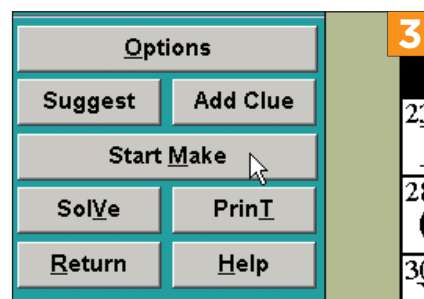
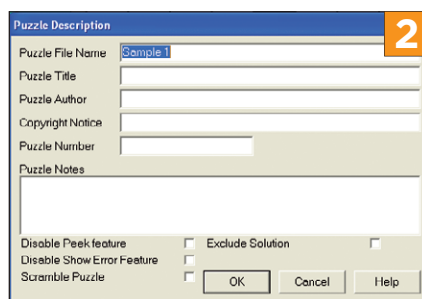
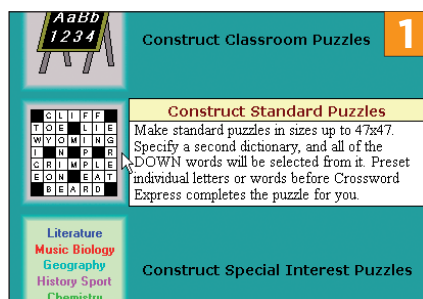
5 Unless you're confident that you'll be able to complete the crossword, you also need a printout containing the solution. There are various ways to do this but the simplest is to click Smart Print again. This time, in the Smart Print dialog box, click Select under Solution Puzzle. Choose the name of the puzzle before clicking OK. Now when you click on Print you'll get a hard copy with a small solution grid shown in the corner.

6 Making crosswords using the standard dictionary is fine if you want to while away the odd few minutes. But if you want to create educational puzzles or crosswords for a magazine or newsletter, you'll need to use your own dictionaries containing your own specialist words and clues. So our next job is to create a new dictionary. Select Dictionary Maintenance from the Screen menu to go to the Dictionaries screen. Next click on New Dictionary and then, in the New Dictionary dialog box, enter a name for your dictionary. Make sure it starts with \$, which marks it as a special interest dictionary. Select 'Insert only multi-word lengths' and click OK.

7 Your dictionary has now been created, but it's empty so we need to fill it with words.

EXPERT TIP

An easy way to get a printout of the solution is to press Alt-Print Screen on the keyboard while the Make a Puzzle page is displayed. Then in Word, select Copy from the Edit menu and print as normal.



Click on Edit Dictionary and the editing screen appears. Click to place the cursor in the Word box and type your first word. Then click in the Clue box and type the corresponding clue. Press Enter on the keyboard to terminate the clue and the word will appear in the list on the left-hand side of the screen.

Continue adding words until you've finished, then click on Save and Quit. If you include too few words, Crossword Express will be unable to complete a standard puzzle. You'll still be able to create a special interest puzzle, as we'll see in Step 11, and if your dictionary is short of words then it's easy to add more words later.

8 In addition to creating your own dictionary you might like to produce your own lattices. This isn't only a matter of aesthetics. The lattice also dictates the lengths of the words used. For example, if you created a dictionary containing some words that were 10 letters long, they would never get used unless you created your own lattice. This is because none of the supplied lattices has words of this length.

To create a new lattice, select Lattice Maintenance from the Screens menu. Click on Create and then, in the Define a new Lattice dialog box, enter a name for your lattice. You also need to enter its dimensions as the number of boxes across and down (remember that the unregistered version lets you print and save crosswords up to 10x10 squares only) and the symmetry code. The symmetry code is explained quite well in the Help menu, but for now just enter an 'a'. This produces an attractive four-way symmetry of blacked-out squares. Click OK.

9 Your new lattice starts off with all the squares white, so your next job is to define those squares you want to be black. Click inside the first square you want to turn black and then click on the Enter button that appears next to a picture of a black square. Your selected square will turn black, as will another three in the lattice to maintain the symmetry.

Continue until you're happy with the lattice. If you accidentally turn the wrong square black, just click on it and then on the Space button that

appears next to a picture of a white square. When you've finished, click on Save.

10 We are now ready to make a crossword puzzle using our newly created dictionary and lattice. But instead of making an ordinary puzzle like we did last time, we're going to generate a special interest crossword puzzle. This uses dictionaries in such a way that you can still produce a puzzle even if you haven't added enough words into your special interest dictionary. Select Construct Special Interest Puzzles from the Screen menu to go to the Special Interest Puzzles screen. At first sight, this looks like the Make a Puzzle screen that we used in earlier steps. However, there are a few differences, as we're about to find out.

11 Click on Lattice and then, in the Select a Lattice dialog box, choose the name of the lattice you created in Steps 8 and 9 before clicking on OK. Click on SI Dictionaries and then, in the Special Interest Dictionary Selection dialog box, click on the top Select button. Choose the dictionary you created in Step 6 before clicking on OK and then OK again.

Alternatively, if you haven't yet added many words to your dictionary but want to see how special interest puzzles work, choose one of the special interest dictionaries supplied with Crossword Express. You can use more than one special interest dictionary, but we'll just use the one for now. English (the standard dictionary) is already selected as the Backfill Dictionary and we don't need to change this. The backfill dictionary is the one from which words will be selected if there aren't enough in the special interest dictionary. Finally, click on Start Make to generate a puzzle. The status indicator 'Making Puzzle' will appear at the bottom of the page under Status; it might be some time before the Puzzle Completed dialog box appears.

It takes a lot longer to generate a special interest puzzle than a standard one. When the dialog box appears, click on OK. However, if you don't want to wait for Crossword Express to

CROSSWORD EXPRESS AT A GLANCE

■ You might have thought it was strange, in Step 5, that you had to select the name of the puzzle to print a copy of the solution alongside the blank grid and clues. But for published crosswords, the solution you'll want to show isn't of the current puzzle but of a puzzle that was published earlier, perhaps the day before.

■ If you want to produce crosswords to publish, you ought to register Crossword Express and, in so doing, you'll get rid of the registration reminder on your printouts. However, if you want to try out the demo version a bit longer and the nag message annoys you, it's easy to remove it. First, copy your crossword to the Windows clipboard as in Step 12. Then paste it into your favourite drawing package. You will find that the 'Please Register' text is a separate object that you can delete before printing it out.

■ If you fancy trying your hand with cryptic clues, you'll be delighted to know that Crossword Express includes an anagram generator. Select Find Anagrams from the Tools menu to see the Find Anagrams dialog box. Just type in the word and click on OK to see a list of possible anagrams. It listed 24,188 anagrams for 'Computer Shopper'.

create a puzzle with the maximum possible number of words from the special interest dictionary, you can click Stop Make at any time, as long as all the boxes have been filled in. You'll be able to see your completed puzzle onscreen. The words that have been taken from the special interest dictionary are highlighted in blue.

12 When we created our first crossword we just printed it out, but often you'll want to insert it into another document. To do this, follow the instructions in Step 4. Instead of clicking on Print in the Smart Print dialog box, click on Export. Click on OK when another dialog box appears telling you that your crossword has been placed on the Windows clipboard. Then open the document (for example, a Word file) into which you want to place the crossword. Position the cursor at the insertion point and select Paste from the Edit menu. 

